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ABSTRACT

The author presents a rationale for incorporating a career/life adjustment curriculum into the learning disabled student's program from school entry to exit, and gives suggestions and objectives for each educational level. Suggested for kindergarten are teaching social competence and appropriate work behaviors, inviting visitors such as firemen, and stressing six objectives such as learning to differentiate between work and play. Suggested for the elementary level, to offset emphasis on academic deficit remediation, is emphasizing social skills, using six objectives such as learning to comprehend the importance of skills to jobs at home, school, and society; and making generous use of introducing to the classroom "guests" who work. Suggested for the secondary level, to improve such deficits as lack of self-concept, are three objectives such as making it possible for the learner to have work experience. Implementation of the career/life curriculum should be stressed as a priority if it has not previously been presented sequentially. (MC)

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CAREER LIFE ADJUSTMENT EDUCATION FOR THE LD LEARNER

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Running Head: Career Life Adjustment for the LD Learner

CAREER/LIFE ADJUSTMENT EDUCATION FOR THE LD LEARNER

Current educational programs for LD learners, even those with grade level academic skills are clearly not sufficient to help them "make it" in a regular classroom or in the "real world" of work and social relationships in a complex society.

Chandler (1982) who contacted LD teachers in 23 school districts in 11 states wrote:

> The problem heard most often was that although LD (and EMR) children usually increase their basic skills in the resource room, while some even reach grade levels as measured by the individual standardized tests, those same children fail when returned to the classroom full time. In resource rooms or tutorial sessions, basic skills are emphasized: teachers attempt to get the child up to grade levels in reading, math, spelling and writing. (p. 503)

In this same article, Chandler was right on target when he stated, "These are the children who do not pick up on social signals, who are not well liked by children or adults, and who cannot learn unless they are taught each specific concept or movement." (p. 504)

Closer Look (1980) commented as follows concerning letters received from parents of LD children:

> Of these, the most distressing appeals for help come from people whose sons or daughters are finished with school and face massive frustration in their search for employment. Whatever problems they have had when they were in school seem to multiply in the working world. Few have had an introduction to the everyday realities of job life. Opportunities for vocational education in high school for disabled youngsters are still rare, far short of the need. And most vocational education programs are not geared to the needs of

learning disabled students. (p. 1)

According to Minskoff (1982)...."it is evident that something critical is missing in the education of many learning disabled students. What is lacking is a program that prepares the students to function as competent individuals in the everyday world." (p. 311)

Career/life adjustment curriculum or similar curriculum by any other name must be an integral component of the LD learner's program from school entry to exit. Without appropriate preparation, LD children and young adults will continue to fail in the mainstream of school and society, nor can career/life adjustment preparation begin too early in any child's life. We can no longer consider this aspect of curriculum as appropriate to secondary grade levels as we have in the past. It is imperative to begin appropriate intervention immediately when social or academic deficits are recognized.

Career Education in Kindergarten?

You bet! Even earlier, if possible, for the LD child. The lack of appropriate social/work-conduct skills can lead to failure in kindergarten just as lack of these skills can lead to problems on any job. The complexities of initial adjustment to school should not be minimized for any child. Neither children nor adults can succeed in their respective "mainstreams" without career/life adjustment competencies. The school is the work place for children. Learning to function well as a "worker" and with social success in school is often especially difficult for the LD child. Special emphasis on social and work skills is often required. If LD children lack social and conduct skills for kindergarten and later school success, they must be taught these skills even if it means taking something else out of their curriculum or perhaps postponing first grade.

At kindergarten and primary levels social competence

and appropriate work behaviors can be taught in conjunction with academic curriculum. Kindergarten children have a right to be taught needed work and social skills as they work and play in school. Subject matter curriculum can be accompanied by instruction and practice in precisely what it entails "to study" or to conduct oneself according to expectations for different activities children need to experience the benefits of these behaviors for themselves, the class, the school and their community.

It is a rare 5 or 6 year old who isn't highly motivated about having, when they grow up, almost every career and/or vocation to which they are exposed as children. Parents, television, school visitors such as nurses, policemen and firemen are powerful influences on "career decisions" for the young child. These resources can be curricular gold mines for teachers. Too, when children attend school for the first few grades, Social Studies curriculum characteristically

centers around the "community", how it functions, and how the workers within it affect children's lives. This curriculum and the experiences in school can be a rich beginning to career/life adjustment preparation for LD children when it is modified to meet their special learning needs.

Exposure isn't tantamount to learning or to competency, however. And teachers must take special care to teach LD learners to use knowledge and experiences competently as they function within the institution of the school. Gillet (1981) stressed the importance of a sequential curriculum in vocational/career education as the LD child moves through the grades. She identified the following (paraphrased here) as some appropriate objectives for primary LD school children:

The children will be able to:

1. see themselves as individuals
2. understand the general concept of work

3. differentiate between work and play

4. identify work activities and relate them to their interests

5. relate their personal habits and experiences to work

6. identify rewards for work in their lives and in the lives of others.

These objectives can easily be related to competence and standards for social behaviors in kindergarten as well as to progress and performance in the content areas. The objectives relate directly to the attitudes and work behaviors required for the success of adult role models of children, too. Teachers, the community helpers of early Social Studies curriculum, and parents are, like the children, also workers and all contribute to fulfilling the needs of the family and the community through their work at home, in school and on the job. Kindergarten and primary grade curriculum and the life experiences of children at home and in school abound with

opportunities to begin career/life adjustment preparation to help insure the LD child a place in the mainstream of school and community.

Career Education in the Elementary Grades

Most LD children become part of a special program or class after attending school for a year or more. Many of these children suffer from "emotional overlay", i.e., they feel frustrated as a result of their lack of academic and social success, and they show it in their behaviors in school. They are often perceived as behavior/conduct problems in the classroom. Teachers understandably refer the "squeaky-wheel" child first for evaluation for possible diagnosis as learning disabled. These are primarily children whose behaviors in regular classes are described as "disruptive", "hyperactive", etc. In most current special education programs, the "squeaky-wheel" or social/emotional dimension of the child's curriculum needs is not

emphasized. Academic deficits are addressed on the assumption that academic gains will lead to successful academic and social/conduct performance. This is an erroneous assumption. Grade level performance in the content areas is not by itself sufficient for children to function in a regular classroom, or in any mainstream of school or society. Without remediation, social/conduct problems often worsen over time. Too, Social Studies curriculum characteristically moves away from "the community" to studies of the child's state history, of Indians, etc., and elementary grade curriculum often has increasingly less of a direct relationship to the everyday experiences of children. Career/life adjustment curriculum to aid the child in the mainstreaming process thus often decreases just at the time it may be needed most.

It is recommended here that if appropriate kindergarten career/life adjustment curriculum has not been part of the LD child's program, it must be implemented

immediately when the child is enrolled in a special program. It must begin at the beginning with the same objectives as those for younger children. Every effort possible must be made to teach every child the work and social skills necessary for social/conduct success at any grade level if there are deficits. These skills can be taught in conjunction with academic remediation. However, they must not be confused with academic progress. Academic progress and knowledge are "tools" while career/life skills and competencies relate to how these skills are attained and utilized in the child's everyday life experiences. Poor acheivement in Reading may be an inconvenience in one's work, but it should never be allowed to interfere with good "work", social habits and attitudes. Too, just as teachers use developmental sequences of instruction for grade levels in the subject areas, they should also follow the sequential levels for career/life adjustment curriculum through the grades.

Gillet (1973) identified these (paraphrased here)

as objectives to follow those given above:

The learner will be able to:

1. identify as a working contributor to home and school
2. comprehend the importance of skills to jobs at home, school and society
3. relate skills learned in school to paid employment and to students' current experiences as workers
4. appreciate the contribution of a wide range of work and workers
5. understand the attitudes that help and hinder work performance
6. understand how they are viewed by others as workers, friends, etc.

It is recommended here that ID teachers make generous use of "guests" or almost any working person, as resources for career/life adjustment curriculum. Parents often are working at two jobs--home and work place.

Children can develop better understanding of their general responsibilities and that of their parents and others through parent presentations in classrooms and through visitations to the work place of parents as well. Seldom do children have the opportunity to see their parents working on their jobs. It represents an area where knowledge and understanding of their parents as workers on the part of children is assumed, often erroneously.

Leisure activities, hobbies and socialization should not be neglected in career/life adjustment education. As children mature, "play" usually becomes more structured and behavioral expectations change and are refined in school. LD children, more than most children, need to be taught, and to practice acceptable social behaviors for their age and grade levels. There are commercial programs available for all age and grade levels to help children learn social skills and understanding of themselves and others. Appropriate

programs should be a daily part of every LD child's curriculum. This curriculum is of special importance for the LD child who has been removed from the regular classroom for "disruptive", "hyperactive", or for other conduct problem behaviors. Without intervention to increase skills in work and social behaviors, we cannot expect the elementary LD child with social/conduct problems to make it back into the mainstream of school--nor into the mainstream of adulthood later.

The Secondary LD Student and Career Education

If career/life adjustment preparation has not been a large part of the LD learner's curriculum by secondary school, it should have been. Muraski (1982) stated "during the past eight years, special educators have repeatedly heard that learning disabled adolescents have a variety of deficits which impede their ability to function in the world of work." (p. 65) Muraski

identifies areas of deficits for the LD student at this level as, "social perception", "self concept", "level of career maturity", "achievement" and "functional skills". Delinquency and unemployment are commonly known to relate to learning disabilities, as well. With deficits in these crucial areas it is difficult to imagine success for the LD young adult in getting and keeping a job at anytime, much less during these times of high unemployment. To begin vocational training, or career/life adjustment preparation, as late as junior or senior high school for any child, much less the LD learner is clearly not in the best interests of children. But if it has not been part of the ongoing curriculum, as it should have been, career/life adjustment education must be begun immediately, and it must be implemented in as much depth as possible.

According to Gillet (1982) high school should represent a somewhat final phase of career education for the LD learner. Gillet lists these as some of the

objectives (paraphrased here) for this phase:

The learner will be able to:

1. consider his/her own strengths and weaknesses in relation to career choices
2. have work experience
3. develop competencies and knowledge concerning appropriate work attitudes, responsibilities and competencies of behaviors.

There is considerable curriculum which has been developed to help achieve these objectives. Unfortunately, most junior and senior high school students will have had neither ongoing career/life adjustment curriculum through the years in regular or special classes, nor will they receive much, if any, in junior or senior high school as programs now exist. Resource room or special education teachers will spend much of the time trying to help these students get passing grades in any regular classes they are taking and/or the LD student will be tutored to be helped to pass required

proficiency tests for graduation. Neither of these choices can be expected to aid the student significantly in meeting their career/life adjustment needs. Nor does the continued emphasis on raising achievement levels in content areas help most secondary LD students prepare for life after graduation.

The secondary special educator must, at the very least, expose students to the realities of what to expect after graduation and help them to be aware of alternatives available for vocational or other training in the student's geographical area.

If an LD high school student will graduate with no marketable skills, he or she must receive counseling and guidance in special education classes and be assisted in enrollment in night school or community college programs whenever possible. "Survival" and functional program materials should be implemented in special classes in spite of pressures on LD secondary students

and their teachers for tutoring to insure graduation. For most secondary level LD students, career/life adjustment curriculum is crucial. It should be made the first priority by all secondary special educators.

Summary

Far too many LD students graduate from high school without the social and work skills necessary for functional adulthood. The LD learner's needs for career/life adjustment education necessitates major change in emphasis of special education curriculum. Career/life adjustment preparation is needed for LD learners at all grade levels. With appropriate career/life adjustment education through all their school years LD learners will have increased opportunities to become successful members in the mainstream of school and society.

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